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SUBJECT: DAMACHI: OBASANJO FAVORS ODILI, TURNS UP THE HEAT  
ON ATIKU & IBB

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) On September 7 Professor Ukande Damachi, long-time advisor to Former Military President Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) and an established Mission contact, told the Consul General that President Obasanjo was intent on garroting Babangida's presidential ambitions but Babangida was adamant about running. According to Damachi, Obasanjo was angling toward Rivers State Governor Odili as his successor. Furthermore, Damachi attributed recent EFCC investigations into Babangida's son's finances to the President's belief that Babangida, and to a lesser extent Vice President Atiku, choreographed the demise of the third term amendment. Damachi also reported that Obasanjo's publication of the EFCC report on Atiku was precipitated by the desire to have Atiku out of the way before the party convention in December. END SUMMARY.

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OBASANJO SHOWS IBB, ATIKU THE MAILED FIST  
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¶2. (C) Damachi stated the rift between Ibrahim Babangida and President Obasanjo was nigh irreparable. While Obasanjo and Babangida had danced a subtle minuet since 2003 around Babangida's presidential aspirations and Obasanjo's support thereof, the failed third term amendment attempt transformed this tricky posturing into a street brawl, Damachi exclaimed. According to Damachi, Obasanjo was convinced Babangida used his vast fortune to bribe National Assembly members, torpedoing Obasanjo's third term desire. Reverting back to a military mindset, Obasanjo saw this as a stark betrayal by an officer less senior, maintained Damachi. Babangida's apparent duplicity in regularly meeting Obasanjo yet sandbagging his third term offensive enraged Obasanjo, Damachi believed. Thus, Obasanjo has set out to reciprocate -- to destroy Babangida's presidential ambitions.

¶3. (C) Knowing that Obasanjo was seething and wounded after the third term defeat, Damachi advised IBB to mend the breach by visiting Obasanjo, declaring his intentions for the presidency, promising to continue Obasanjo's programs, and seeking the latter's support. The meeting was arranged, but, in hindsight, it was one Damachi wished never occurred. Obasanjo was like stone throughout the session, then when Babangida declared his intention to run, Obasanjo flew into a

rage, then storming out of the room, revealed Damachi. Mutual friends intervened. Weeks later, the two met again. The result was less combustive but leagues away from the cordiality of the past. Two days after this second session, Mohammad Babangida, IBB's eldest son, was detained by the EFCC. It was now Babangida,s turn to be incensed, Damachi recounted. Babangida took Mohammad,s arrest as a personal affront and a public humiliation, asserted Damachi. By this act, Obasanjo has crossed the Rubicon in Babangida,s mind, Damachi stressed.

14. (S) In response to Obasanjo's actions, Babangida convened a council of his most trusted allies -- several retired generals -- to discuss President Obasanjo,s insult. As this meeting began, General John Shagaya assailed Babangida for ignoring his warning about Obasanjo in 1999 when Babangida literally engineered Obasanjo's successful presidential bid. Shagaya said he warned Babangida that Obasanjo was a malevolent ingrate who would turn on Babangida but Babangida discarded the warning, expressing confidence in Obasanjo's fidelity. After that initial exchange, the generals settled down to discuss next steps. Afterwards, the vocal Shagaya captured the spirit of the session, stating "We've been ambushed, and when ambushed, you do not retreat, you push forward." Damachi claimed the military allusion was more than a general using the terminology of his trade. Babangida's coterie may be inching closer to the point of considering the tried and true method of removing an unpopular leader in Nigeria. If Obasanjo pushes much harder, these generals may plan a coup, Damachi forecasted.

15. (C) Regarding Obasanjo's recent publication of the EFCC report against Vice President Atiku, Damachi said his sources within Obasanjo's camp told him Obasanjo wanted to move decisively against Atiku to make the Vice President a virtual

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non-factor before the PDP national convention in early December. Obasanjo had gotten wind of Atiku's plan to undermine the convention by seeking to nominate weak candidates for important posts, then leave the PDP in a disheveled state while seeking the nomination of another party. Thus, Obasanjo decided to launch a pre-emptive strike against Atiku to relegate him Vice President to the PDP sidelines and scatter Atiku's his allies prior to the PDP confabulation.

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IF NO THIRD TERM OR EXTENSION, ODILI MIGHT DO  
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16. (C) Despite the third term defeat, Obasanjo still pined to remain in office after May 29, 2007, argued Damachi. Obasanjo could resurface the third term amendment in November, Damachi suggested. By successfully containing Babangida and Atiku, Obasanjo would have neutralized the third term,s two most formidable opponents. Also, Obasanjo has more leverage over National Assembly members than he did in May. With party primaries and conventions around the corner, the legislators will be preoccupied with their own futures. To retain their party nomination, PDP lawmakers will need Obasanjo's imprimatur. If he seeks to table to third term again, he will almost assuredly draw a linkage between their support for his stay in office with his support for theirs, predicted Damachi.

17. (C) If another term is not in the cards, Damachi believes Governor Odili of Rivers State will be Obasanjo's choice as a successor. First Odili has cultivated Obasanjo for years. Odili also reportedly siphons off a nice chunk of his State,s monthly pecuniary allotment to give to Obasanjo, claimed Damachi.

18. (C) Damachi also finds Odili well positioned regionally and ethnically. As a south-south candidate, Odili only has two rivals, Governor Attah of Akwa Ibom and Donald Duke of

Cross River, who can be convinced to stand aside, thought Damachi. The plan would be for Obasanjo to tell Attah -- he apparently is the new owner of one of the best hotels in Barbados -- and to offer Duke the Nigerian Embassy in Washington as Duke's wife is an ardent Amero-phile who does not like living in Nigeria. Moreover, Odili can exploit his Igbo roots to gain support in the south-east. Thus, being an Igbo governor of a south-south state, Odili is the only governor with strong organic connections to two of the three southern political zones. In order to make a presidential candidate from the south palatable to northerners, Damachi thought Obasanjo would support the Governor of Kaduna State for vice president. However, Damachi theorized that should Obasanjo throw his support to Odili, Babangida, Atiku, and other northerners would ally against Obasanjo's decision and this would greatly exacerbate the north-south political divide.

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) Damachi epitomizes the Nigerian political survivor. On one hand, he is Babangida's long time advisor. But he is also getting close to Governor Odili. The cagey Damachi can do this by telling both masters that his good relations in each camp is their best protection should the other man win. No one can accuse President Obasanjo of such prestidigitation. His decisive moves concerning Atiku and Babangida are subject to but one interpretation: he opposes their presidential bids. Damachi may well be right that the die has been cast. If so and no rapprochement is possible, then Nigeria is in for tumult as these three mammoths and several other lesser titans vie for the ultimate political prize. END COMMENT.  
BROWNE